Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006

Message Text

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PAGE 01 QUEBEC 00232 172138Z

21
ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-02 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-15 /069 W
---------- 061162
R 172045Z SEP 76
FM AMCONSUL QUEBEC
TO AMEMBASSY OTTAWA
INFO SECSTATE WASHDC 710
AMCONSUL MONTREAL

UNCLAS QUEBEC 232

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, CA
SUBJECT: CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUE COULD LEAD TO A NOVEMBER
ELECTION FOR QUEBEC.

1. MONTREAL GAZETTE JOURNALIST BILL FOX HAS ASTUTELY ANALYZED THE IMPACT THE CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUE COULD HAVE ON BOURASSA S IMPENDING DECISION ON TIMING OF AN ELECTION. HE STATES IN A SEPT. 17 ARTICLE THAT THE LIBERAL LEADER IS SERIOUSLY CONSIDERING A MID-NOVEMBER VOTE SHOULD THE CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUE REACH AN IMPASSE AND IF POLLS SHOW THE LIBERALS TO BE STRONG.

2. ACCORDING TO FOX, BOURASSA S ELECTORAL SCENARIO HINGES ON TWO EVENTS SCHEDULED FOR EARLY OCTOBER: THE PREMIERS CONFERENCE IN TORONTO AND THE FEDERAL THRONE SPEECH. IF THE PREMIERS OCT. 1 AND 2 TALKS DO NOT REACH AGREEMENT FOR BRINGING THE BRITISH NORTH AMERICA ACT UNDER CANADIAN CONTROL, FOX BELIEVES - QUOTING SOURCES IN OTTAWA - THAT TRUDEAU WILL MAKE GOOD HIS UNILATERAL REPATRIATION THREAT IN THE OCTOBER 12 SPEECH FROM THE THRONE. "IF HE DOES THAT," ONE QUEBEC LIBERAL IS QUOTED AS SAYING, "WE LL BE GONE THE NEXT DAY."

3. FOX NOTES THAT THE CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUE IS A SHAKY BASE FOR AN ELECTION AS MANY PEOPLE ARE NOT CONCERNED BY IT. HOWEVER, IN FOX S VIEW, THE PREMIER MADE GOOD USE OF THE
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PAGE 02 QUEBEC 00232 172138Z

CONSTITUTIONAL SITUATION WITH HIS "CULTURAL SOVEREIGNTY"

Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006

Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006

PHRASE IN 1973. BOURASSA INITIALLY FAVORED AN AUTUMN, 1977 ELECTION, BUT, ACCORDING TO PARTY SOURCES, "ECONOMIC FORECASTS FOR NEXT YEAR ARE NOT AS ROSY AS THE PREMIER HAD HOPED."

4. EQUALLY IMPORTANT IN THE FINAL DECISION WILL BE THE PARTY S STANDING IN OPINION POLLS. ACCORDING TO FOX S SOURCES, PRIVATE PARTY POLLS INDICATE THE LIBERALS COULD WIN COMFORTA-QBLY IF A NOVEMBER ELECTION WERE HELD. THESE SOURCES CLAIM THE LIBERALS HAVE MADE A "BIG COMEBACK" SINCE REACHING A LOW POINT IN LAST APRIL S POLLS. ACCORDING TO RECENT LIBERAL POLLS, THE PQ, RACKED BY INTERNAL CONFLICT, WOULD WIN NO MORE THAN 15 SEATS. ALSO, THE UNION NATIONALE AND PARTI NATIONAL POPULAIRE HAVE MADE NO PROGRESS, WHILE AN ENGLISH-RIGHTS PARTY, PROPOSED LAST SPRING BY MONTREAL CITY COUNCILLORS, NICK AUF DER MAUR AND BOB KEATON, HAS STILL NOT BEEN LAUNCHED. THE LIBERALS WILL CONDUCT MORE-DETAILED POLLS WITHIN TWO WEEKS IN AN EFFORT TO DETERMINE THE PRECISE ELECTORAL SITUATION. FOX POINTS OUT THAT A SIMILAR POLL WAS HELD JUST PRIOR TO THE 1973 ELECTION.

5. THE LIBERAL CAMPAIGN, IF BOURASSA CALLS A FALL ELECTION, WILL BE BASED ON THREE ISSUES. THE FIRST WILL BE THE CONSTI-TUTIONAL ISSUE, THE SECOND WILL DEAL WITH LABOR RELATIONS, AND THE THIRD WITH HOUSING AND QUALITY OF LIFE. (THIS CORRES-PONDS WITH BOURASSA S FIVE PRIORITY SUBJECTS FOR THE NEXT YEAR.) FOX WRITES THAT THE PREMIER WILL RATIONALIZE HIS DECISION TO SEEK A NEW MANDATE ON THE CONSTITUTION ISSUE BY CITING THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT S HANDLING OF THE AIR TRAFFIX CONTROL CRISIS AS PROOF OTTAWA IS INCAPABLE OF PROTECTING QUEBEC S IULTURAL AND LINGUISTIC RIGHTS.

6. COMMENT: WE WERE SURPRISED TO READ THAT THE LIBERALS FEEL THAT THEY HAVE "BOTTOMED OUT" AND ARE COMING BACK. NOTHING WE HAVE HEARD JUSTIFIES SUCH OPTIMISM. NOR DO WE SENSE THAT THE DISARRAY IN THE PQ IS AS GREAT AS FOX S SOURCES INDICATED. WE BELIEVE THE FORTHCOMING POLL WILL BE THE MOST CRITICAL SINGLE FACTOR IN BOURASSA S UPCOMING DECISION. SHOULD IT BE FAVORABLE, THE CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUE COULD PROVIDE A CONVIENT PRETEXT FOR AN ELECTION.
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PAGE 03 QUEBEC 00232 172138Z

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: PRESS COMMENTS, JOURNALISTS, ELECTION FORECASTS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 17 SEP 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: n/a
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: n/a
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment:
Disposition Date: 01 JAN 1960
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976QUEBEC00232
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760353-0395
From: QUEBEC
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19760948/aaaabpgp.tel
Line Count: 107
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: n/a
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: vandyklc
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 10 MAY 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <10 MAY 2004 by MaustMC>; APPROVED <18 AUG 2004 by vandyklc>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
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US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUE COULD LEAD TO A NOVEMBER ELECTION FOR QUEBEC.
TAGS: PINT, CA, (FOX, BILL), (BOURASSA)
To: OTTAWA
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006